Sacred Journey

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Spring 2011
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SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Fellowship In Prayer

encourages and supports
a spiritual orientation to life,

promotes the practice
of prayer, meditation,
and service to others,

and helps bring about
a deeper spirit of unity
among humankind.

SACRED JOURNEY
THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER
Spring 2011, vol. 62, no. 2

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Submissions
We welcome submissions of articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience and practice, religious faith or similar topics, as well as prayers and poetry. We look for writing that expresses an individual's personal experience while also conveying a deeper message of universal appeal. Writing must be accessible to people of all traditions. Please include a brief biography and full contact information: name, address, phone numbers and email. Articles should not exceed 1500 words and should be submitted to the editor by email: submissions@sacredjourney.org. If necessary, they may be mailed.

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Cover: *Peace Makers: The 13 Grandmothers Council,* a Visionary Painting by Minoche Graglia. "It is time to paint the peace leaders," said the voice in my heart www.earthspiritdecor.com/node/46

Eighteen Fifty Five

When you are born with the "gift of the gab" you generally have full confidence in your own ability to maneuver in and out of most situations that present themselves. However when Janet Haag, Fellowship In Prayer's executive director, asked me to complete a president's message for this month's issue of *Sacred Journey*, I found myself in one of those narrow places where a quick solution was not apparent. This quarter's issue of *Sacred Journey* is devoted to Native American Prayer and Spirituality and she suggested that in my letter I give some attention to Mother Earth.

In introducing myself in the previous issue I established for readers that I am an observant Jew, born in England, living most of my adult life on the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. My sole exposure to Native American Prayer and Spirituality, other than through Hollywood's eyes and the paintings of Frederick Remington, was a copy of a manuscript that hung on the wall of my friend Joy's Manhattan apartment, titled Chief Seattle's Letter, which was purportedly written by a Suquamish chief who lived on the islands of the Puget Sound to US President Franklin Pierce. The letter included many memorable quotes including:

> "Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."
>
> "Earth does not belong to us; we belong to earth."
>
> "How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of the earth is sacred to my people."

Unfortunately in spite of the beautiful prose, the letter is not even remotely authentic. Snopes.com, the final word on urban legends, says that the speech was not written by the very real Chief Seattle in 1855 rather by a Hollywood scriptwriter in 1971.

With my shortcut blocked, I thought about my own Jewish tradition, where there are an abundance of blessings of acknowledgement for God's creation. In fact the name of God mentioned in the opening chapters of Genesis, *Elokim* (k is inserted in place of an h) has, in Hebrew, the same numerical equivalent of 86, as the word *Ha-teva,* which means nature. Jews are obliged to thank God for all aspects of the natural world which they occupy for no other reason than God is source of everything, not only spiritual but physical as well.

Before a meal we bless whatever we are about to eat and drink, following a meal, as a result of the commandment in Deuteronomy 8:10, "You shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God," we bless the land, the food and Jerusalem. There are blessings on smelling fragrant shrubs or trees, on smelling herbs, grasses and flowers, on smelling fragrant fruit, on seeing the wonders of nature, such as lightning, on hearing thunder or experiencing a hurricane, on seeing a rainbow, on seeing the ocean, on seeing trees blossoming for the first time in the year and on seeing beautiful scenes of nature and so on. Every month, we bless the new moon and once every 28 years we bless the cycle of the sun (most recently in 2009). We bless the seasons, the rain and the dew.

In January of this year my father passed away, coincidentally at the age of 86. Like many Englishmen he worked hard in creating and sustaining his garden, it was a place to him of great tranquility and joy. With enormous pride he surveyed the trees and the bushes, the flowers and the little orchard, the Cherwell River that meandered through the garden and the water meadow. His garden was a source of great blessing.

Growing up and spending time in that garden also takes me back to childhood memories of reading the great words of Henry Wandsworth Longfellow. Written in 1855 his poem

The Song of Hiawatha may more accurately reflect the sentiments of Chief Seattle as well as the purity and simplicity of the Native American's co-existence with the natural world:

> Ye who love the haunts of Nature,
> Love the sunshine of the meadow,
> Love the shadow of the forest,
> Love the wind among the branches,
> And the rain-shower and the snow-storm,
> And the rushing of great rivers
> Through their palisades of pine-trees,
> And the thunder in the mountains,
> Whose innumerable echoes
> Flap like eagles in their eyries;—
> Listen to these wild traditions,
> To this Song of Hiawatha!

I hope you enjoy both the Spring season and what you are about to read in this edition of SACRED JOURNEY.

With warmest regards,

David Newton

David Newton is President of Fellowship In Prayer.

Lessons From Our Grandmothers

JANET M. HAAG

Each time we talked about this issue's featured interview with the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, I found myself breaking into a smile. It struck me this was occurring because just saying the word grandmother evoked the positive memories I have of my own grandmothers. Surprisingly, I don't recall much of what my grandmothers most certainly said to me over the years but what I do vividly remember is being enveloped in hugs that were warm and soft and left me feeling incredibly safe and loved. It seems fitting that Grandmothers, known for nurturing, should take on the challenge of calling us all to care more deeply for the Earth, to recognize our rootedness, and claim our responsibility to make this planet a place that will be hospitable for generations to come.

The Grandmothers are models of how prayer can and should lead us to greater environmental and social consciousness. Moments of prayer and quiet reflection foster reverence. In this space we are prompted to shed our illusions, to see things for what they really are, to listen—really listen, and to confront ourselves and find the courage for our convictions. Prayer is by no means intended to be a passive enterprise.

Perhaps, as you peruse this issue of *Sacred Journey*, you will be moved to prayer and to do something a little differently to heal the Earth and contribute to the well being of future generations. Perhaps, you will be encouraged to ponder lessons from your grandmothers. If you'd like to share them with us, please visit our blog.

Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship In Prayer.

An Interview with Jyoti (Janeane Prevatt) Grandmother Margaret Behan Grandmother Mona Polacca

The Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers first came together in New York in 2004 to discuss the fate of the Earth and how to revive the traditions, rituals and medicines that could save it. Their teaching represents a universal morality in which ancient and modern ways are brought together to care for the future. Bernadette Rebienot, a Bwiti elder and grandmother of twenty three had a vision of an International Grandmothers Council based on the grandmothers of Gabon who would gather in the forest to share their visions and to pray for world peace and the well being of their people. When Jyoti (Janeane Prevatt) went to Gabon to study with Rebienot, they discovered they shared this vision and they decided to work together to manifest it in the West. Jyoti, as Spiritual Director of the Center for Sacred Studies, mobilized her organization to convene the first Global Women's Gathering and the Council was born.

Jyoti is an internationally renowned spiritual adviser and psychological consultant. Her background includes education in cross-cultural spiritual practices, social service program development, training at the Jung Institute in Switzerland, and extensive international travel. She has devoted her life to bringing unity to the planet by facilitating the development of alliances between individuals who are the guardians of indigenous culture and traditional medicine ways. The grandmothers have named Jyoti their Ambassador Charged with the Mission. Jyoti is also one of the founders of Kayumari, a spiritual healing community located in the Sierra foothills of California, the North Bay of San Francisco, New York, Switzerland, Prague and the Brazilian Amazon.

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Grandmother Margaret Behan (Red Spider Woman) is Kit Fox on her mother's side and Rabbit Lodge on her father's side. When she was an infant her grandfather put up a tipi and held a ceremony for her life. "In Cheyenne, such a ceremony is expressed as, 'He planted prayers for me.'" As a child, she attended the Catholic Mission and Governmental Boarding schools. She recalls when her parents visited they told her the tribal legends and lessons so she would not forget her culture. Margaret is the fourth generation of the Sand Creek Massacre. Today, Margaret is an accomplished dance leader, award-wining sculptress, author, poet and playwright. She has presented retreats for women, adult children of alcoholics and co-dependents. She is taking an active role as leader of her tribe as a teacher of Cheyenne Culture and the founder of the Cheyenne Elders Council.

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Grandmother Mona Polacca is a Hopi/Havasupai/Tewa elder. She believes that her origins are as important as her name—Polacca means butterfly in the Hopi language. It was her paternal grandfather who named her. In Hopi lore, the butterfly symbolizes man's spiritual transformation. Mona has her MSW and serves on several United Nations Committees addressing the issues of indigenous people. She is a featured author, speaker, and educator on the human rights of indigenous people and on aging, mental health, addiction and violence. She is the president/CEO of The Turtle Island Project, *a not-for-profit program that promotes a vision of wellness by providing trans-cultural training to individuals, families and healthcare providers.*

Fellowship In Prayer: What is the overarching message of The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers?

Jyoti: I believe the heart of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers is most clearly expressed in their mission statement:

> We represent a global alliance of prayer, education and healing for our Mother Earth, all Her inhabitants, all the children, and for the next seven generations to come. We are deeply concerned with the unprecedented destruction of our Mother Earth and the destruction of indigenous ways of life. We believe the teachings of our ancestors will light our way through an uncertain future. We look to further our vision through the realization of projects that protect our diverse cultures: lands, medicines, language and ceremonial ways of prayer and through projects that educate and nurture our children.

How did you come to form this alliance of prayer, education and healing?

Jyoti: The origins of the council began for me in 1998 when a vision of "Our Lady" appeared and told me, "I am going to give you one of my most precious baskets. In this basket are some of my most treasured jewels. These jewels represent lines of prayer that go back to the original times. Do not mix them. Do not change them. Protect and keep them safe. Walk them through the door of the millennia and hand them back to me. I have something we are going to do." I did not understand this vision when it first came, but it has taken me on a path that has awakened a deep relationship with the Earth and the peoples of this Earth that are her guardians. Eventually, it took me to Gabon, Africa, where I with my children and Ann Rosencranz, met with Grandmother Bernadette Rebienot. In sharing this vi-

sion with its subtle promptings that it was time to call together grandmothers from around the world, she acknowledged she too was having this vision. She declared it was time to do it now. I then traveled to the Brazilian Amazon and met with Grandmothers Maria Alice and Clara who also encouraged me to put this prayer into motion. Through connections within my international community, we were led to invite sixteen grandmothers to come to upstate New York in October, 2004. Thirteen grandmothers came and upon arrival each recognized the energy that was calling us into action and accepted the "basket of diverse jewels." They formed a relationship with the Center for Sacred Studies, and declared their mission for the Earth and her children. Only then did we realize there was a prophecy held by many indigenous peoples around the globe that spoke of a time when thirteen grandmothers would come to shake the world awake. Grandmother Rita Blumenstein told us about a time when she was nine years old and her grandmother sat her down and said,

> "When you get old and grey like me, you will be called to sit on a council of thirteen grandmothers. I have made thirteen sacred bundles and gathered thirteen eagle feathers. When that time comes, pass these out to the other grandmothers and take one for yourself and sit down at that table. Know that I am standing behind you, and so are all your ancestors, and the time we have been preparing for has arrived. As she told us this story, she cried and said, "We are late. But we are here."

The seed of this vision is carried in many of us, and it has galvanized a global movement for peace and unity among all peoples. It was foretold. It is its time!

Why is prayer such an important aspect to your gatherings?

Grandmother Margaret: Prayer is a sacred connection for us—a sacred time. My Grandmother taught me that we are always in prayer. Whatever we are doing, our hands and feet call out to the spirits to align us with nature—the Mother—that brought us into this lineage of life. At our gatherings, we want to be present in this grace, to have alignment within ourselves and with nature when we are speaking about world peace because then we can send this peaceful vibration outwards. Prayer is not just a personal matter—we're connecting with the whole of the Sacred. We make a sound to signal that we are present and that time, all around us, is the movement of life. We ask our spirits to come and make our gathering valuable so that we can build a presence that will touch the whole world with the spirit of peace. We do this by chanting and making alignment with the elements, like air and water, and with the people who are present and with all human beings. It is like a creation story. All the elements of life are called to come forth and take our prayer where the power is to be made manifest.

I was eight years old when my grandparents taught me to speak to the elements, to the vibration and energy in this world that would cherish my prayers. I needed to hear myself pray and my prayer has brought me to the Grandmothers—and to this time. For many of us coming here has been a journey of prayer.

Among the Grandmothers, we all feel the same spirit but only one of us prays at a time—we take turns when we gather in the day and in the evening. But at any time, even if we're in council, if one of us feels the need to pray for something particular, any grandmother may speak up and say, "Let's pray for..." Then, we hold hands and we pray aloud for our special issue or concern. Sometimes, our prayer is for people who are leaving this earth, or have left this earth. Sometimes, we pray for their families or for what is behind the trauma, the suffering, the transition. For instance, now, we would pray for the people affected by the earthquake in Japan.

Is there one guiding principle to the spiritual practices of all First Nation peoples?

Jyoti: If there is one guiding principle of our First Nation peoples, it would be that all things of this Earth are equal. All life is sacred. Creation is the guiding hand behind all right action. When I was asked to put this prayer in motion, I felt a bit overwhelmed. How could I know which grandmothers the Universe was calling? Then I heard Grandmother say, "Granddaughter, if you will start with the seed of it all, then all will unfold naturally. And the seed of it all is relations." And I have come to understand over the years, that it is through relations that all unfolds in the world of First Nation. How we relate to life—how we relate to ourselves and each other—how we relate to Creation—how we relate to the Earth—how we relate to our Ancestors—how we relate. And finally, it is important to remember that what we do, we do for the next seven generations.

What exactly is the significance of seven generations?

Grandmother Mona: Well, the significance of the next seven generations is not something the Grandmothers just came up with, it has been a reference point for the practice of indigenous people from time immemorial. The way my Mother always said it was, "You are not here just for yourself. You are an extension of your ancestors. They made the way for you to arrive here, for you to survive in this world because they knew that whatever they did would have an impact that would last through the next seven generations. They've walked this way and left this place for you."

Grandmother Margaret: Thinking about the next seven generations reminds us we are to carry life on in a respectful way. Life is a gift, a very beautiful gift, and we need to honor its sacredness so the next seven generations can experience it.

Grandmother Mona: There's an order for how we are to live, including how we are to live on Mother Earth. The indigenous people refer to this order as the "Original Instructions." We are a seventh generation now. Every generation is a seventh generation and we are instructed to conduct our lives on Mother Earth with consideration for all those who will follow after us, extending out to seven generations. We must think beyond our own existence here and now, today. We have to think about the future and rather than having a 20-year strategic plan on how we're going to do this or that to address the problems we face, as indigenous people we think well beyond twenty years to the next seven generations.

Given the violence that has already been perpetrated against Mother Earth, how can we begin to heal her?

Grandmother Mona: Well, one of the things that we, the Grandmothers, do first is to be open to listening, to receiving information from those who are concerned about what's happening to Mother Earth. For instance, the Lakota Grandmothers from South Dakota came to our first Council meeting in 2004, and raised their concern about the uranium mining that was starting in South Dakota, across the river from the very land where Grandmother Beatrice Long Visitor Holy Dance hosts her Sundance. Plus this area is a wild horse sanctuary where over three hundred fifty mustangs run free. Along this bank of the Cheyenne River exploratory drilling for uranium was taking place. So we Grandmothers took on their concern and are supporting the Lakota Grandmothers with written affidavits to the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) asking that mining permits be denied. A hearing was held and the Lakota people were given a time to testify. This takes more support than you know. A small Lakota tribal community can't make all needed changes on their own, but we know they're not the only

ones who are going to be impacted by this drilling. They just happen to be the closest to it and they have been brave enough to step forward; to create awareness. We, the Grandmothers, have supported their efforts by writing affidavits as well. We were also given a donation which in turn we donated to them to help with the legal costs of supporting the position of the Lakota people. I can't say it is because of us that progress is being made but I think we have helped. This issue around uranium drilling is part of an ongoing process, one that has not yet been resolved. I'd like to make this further point: the sad thing is that the burden of proof, of justifying that we are being adversely affected by exposure to the uranium, is on us. We are the ones who talk about the sacredness of our relationship with Mother Earth, as well as the sacredness of our relationships with the water, the air—the basic foundations of human life. And these are being contaminated and it is our health that is being jeopardized. And there's no doubt about it, you know, that we are the population living around this uranium contamination. So, creating awareness, is one way we, the Grandmothers, are beginning to heal Mother Earth.

We have also supported the United Nation's "Universal Declaration of The Rights of Mother Earth," drafted by indigenous people of the world and presented to the Secretary General of the United Nations in May 2010. The indigenous people gather every year at the United Nations to present their issues. The session is called The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). I've been attending and will be there again this year. The Declaration was initially discussed in 1993 but our first session, specifically focused on this issue, was held in 2002. A strategy for change that has worked in the past is having the public take a look at this kind of declaration and initiate a campaign of support through their United Nations representatives. This is a way all of us can participate in lessening the violence that's being perpetrated against Mother Earth.

Grandmother Margaret: When we, the Grandmothers, speak, we are unfolding meaning. We are speaking to bring our concerns into everyone's awareness. We all need to start being mindful, to pray, to come into alignment with the sacredness of life, to be careful with our food, to recycle so we don't make the world sick by polluting it. If we do this, the earth and its inhabitants can begin to heal.

What teachings of our ancestors do you think we need to reclaim for all the inhabitants of this planet to live in peace?

Grandmother Mona: Well, our mission as the Grandmothers is to create awareness that we are all dependent on Mother Earth—the water, air, earth and fire. We're all dependent on these basic foundations, sources of life. Then, we need to get beyond looking at our differences, to looking at our similarities and recognizing that through these similarities, we are all related. This is the basic teaching that all of humankind needs to go back to. It's like that little phrase "getting back to the basics."Today, with the condition the world is in environmentally, we are being pushed into a corner to really take a look at how we are going to survive. So to me, the most important teachings are recognizing we are all dependent on the same basic things to live and recognizing this means we are all related. Even beyond human life we are all related—the plant life, the animal life, all the water life and land life, we are all interdependent, relying on Mother Earth to live.

One of the things to remember is there are people—indigenous people who have lived in areas of the world that are referred to by Western society as underdeveloped countries, underdeveloped land, underdeveloped peoples. However, these people have lived there from time immemorial without all of the conveniences and technology that the Western society maintains is necessary in order to live in this world. These people should

be respected if they choose not to embrace a Western world-view and they should be left alone to live in peace and harmony, the way they have been living without the influences of Western society. When we talk about all inhabitants of this planet, living in peace, these people too must be allowed to live in peace.

Grandmother Margaret: We need to realize we can come together and resolve our problems and we need to be more sensitive to one another. My Cheyenne people have experienced many hardships—my mother told me when they were migrating from the north during the Ice Age, they were hit by an iceberg and some of them blessed themselves and saw it as a message. Some went back north and others came south. There was the genocide of the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864 and somehow, my family made it through that. We need to know we can make it through catastrophes; we can survive the great dangers in life. We can live together in peace.

Do you teach these lessons and traditions to your children and grandchildren?

Grandmother Mona: Yes, I do. I am working on that now and I get good reminders from them to tell them our history. That's actually an important aspect about our traditional way of teaching. We think a child is ready to learn about something when they ask. Of course, there are certain ceremonies they are led through and teachings they are given without being asked. My grandsons and granddaughter have been through our initiations or rites of passage but certain knowledge is only passed on when they ask. This is how I teach them and I hope they will do the same for their children and grandchildren someday.

What prophecy or vision would you most like us to carry forth from this conversation?

Grandmother Mona: I was about fourteen years old when I first heard this Hopi prophecy, so this isn't necessarily a vision of my own. It is a vision of the old people, the ones that were here way, way, way, way back, you know, from time immemorial—their traditional knowledge was imparted to me. I learned that we had a covenant with the creator to "guard, protect and hold the land in trust." This is the teaching I follow and I think it is one to which we should all be committed.

Grandmother Margaret: I am deeply moved by this question. Thousands of years ago, the Cheyenne people experienced a great famine. They received instruction from Sweet Medicine, a prophet who taught them how to live and led them through a holy ceremony to renew the earth. He reminded the Cheyenne that when bad times came, they should remain strong and be "perpetuators of life." For many years our people felt we had to go underground with our ceremonies but now I think it is important to bring this ceremony forward again because it is a prayer the whole world needs.

Thank you all for sharing your stories and your visions with us!

The next public gathering of the Grandmothers Council will be held in Anchorage, Alaska from May 18-21. For registration information go to the 'Events' page of the Grandmothers' web site: www.grandmotherscouncil.org. The story of the Grandmothers Council is told in a beautiful movie, For the Next 7 Generations. *Some of the grandmothers are traveling with the "Timeless Message Tour" where a Q&A follows the screening of the film. To learn if the tour will be in a city near you, to purchase the DVD or obtain additional information, please visit www.forthenext7generations.com.*

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THE GREAT SPIRIT IS IN ALL THINGS,
HE IS IN THE AIR WE BREATHE.
THE GREAT SPIRIT IS OUR FATHER,
BUT THE EARTH IS OUR MOTHER. SHE NOURISHES US;
THAT WHICH WE PUT INTO THE GROUND
SHE RETURNS TO US . . .
BIG THUNDER, (BEDAGI) WABANAKI ALGONQUIN

WE RECOGNIZE THE SPIRITUAL IN ALL CREATION
AND BELIEVE THAT WE DRAW POWER FROM IT.
OHIYESA, DAKOTAH SIOUX

The land is sacred. These words are at
the core of your being. The land is our mother,
the rivers our blood. Take our land away and we die.
That is, the Indian in us dies.
MARY BRAVE BIRD, (SICANGU OYATE), LAKOTA

I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not
enough for a man to depend simply upon himself.
LONE MAN (ISNA-LA-WICA), TETON SIOUX

THE PAST IS NOT A BURDEN;
IT IS A SCAFFOLD WHICH BROUGHT US TO THIS DAY.
WE ARE FREE TO BE WHO WE ARE—
TO CREATE OUR OWN LIFE OUT OF OUR PAST
AND OUT OF THE PRESENT.
RITA PITKA BLUMENSTEIN, YUP'IK

WE WHO ARE CLAY BLENDED BY THE MASTER POTTER COME FROM THE KILN OF CREATION IN MANY HUES. HOW CAN PEOPLE SAY ONE SKIN IS COLORED, WHEN EACH HAS ITS OWN COLORATION? WHAT SHOULD IT MATTER THAT ONE BOWL IS DARK AND THE OTHER PALE, IF EACH IS OF GOOD DESIGN AND SERVES ITS PURPOSE WELL?

POLINGAYSI QOYAWAYMA, HOPI

I AM NATURE, ALL HUMAN BEINGS
ARE NATURE—BUT WE FORGET THIS

GRANDMOTHER MARIE ALICE CAMPOS FREIRE,
BRAZILIAN AMAZON RAINFOREST

THE GROWING AND DYING OF THE MOON
REMINDS US OF OUR IGNORANCE
WHICH COMES AND GOES—
BUT WHEN THE MOON IS FULL
IT IS AS IF THE GREAT SPIRIT
WERE UPON THE WHOLE WORLD.

BLACK ELK, OGLALA SIOUX

We are here with a prayer for our generation . . .
the only way to survive is through prayer.

BEATRICE LONG-VISITOR HOLY DANCE, LAKOTA

THE COUNTRY KNOWS. IF YOU DO WRONG THINGS TO IT, THE WHOLE COUNTRY KNOWS. IT FEELS WHAT'S HAPPENING TO IT. I GUESS THAT EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED TOGETHER SOMEHOW, UNDER THE GROUND.

LAVINE WILLIAMS, KOYUKON ELDER

Mountain Mysticism

JOSEPH LITTLE

Here's the truth: Something happened on that volcano in Guatemala. I'm just not sure what.

Steve was in the lead, talking with two teachers from Canada. I was trailing behind, nursing a bad knee. Yes, Steve was in the lead and I was trailing behind and then it happened.

The volcano in question is Pacaya, that black monster of the western highlands known for its dramatic displays of lava, which surge against prediction and against a landscape so austere it rivals the moon. We found Pacaya in Steve's guidebook one Easter weekend. Something about punishing switchbacks and menacing rivers of lava over which folks could roast marshmallows (and they did), and we were in. It all seemed so sensible from the sturdy haven of our in-laws' lake house, Merlot in hand.

Somewhere around 8,000 feet, that all changed. The lush trees that lined our path gave way to shards of basalt, then rock, then long slopes of rubble that climbed into the sky. What few trees remained were arthritic and bent, their charred branches as hapless as they were calligraphic against the bright sky. Soon there was no path, only a windswept ascent that stratified everyone by ability. We would turn a corner, and strange new vistas would appear: jagged fissures in the earth two yards long, coils of braided rock, and waves, waves of lava having long been cooled, blackened, their motion frozen in time. "Pahoehoes," they call them, these cases of rock becoming liquid becoming solid again. Stray dogs in need of warmth sought the company of the fissures, natural manhole covers that vented sulphur and steam from beneath the earth's crust.

After our final turn, I felt the heat of the lava a few seconds before I saw it. After an hour's hike, it was more than a little disappointing—a small vein of red oozing from a titanic wall

of black rock (punishing switchbacks, yes, but a river of hellfire this was not)—until I witnessed the wall itself swell and glow, breathing in ways my Midwestern eyes couldn't reckon. At first, I thought it was just the heat shimmering off the wall, the way a paved road can make the summer horizon dance, but then it cracked. Cracked, I tell you, after centuries, maybe millennia of indifference to the world. The wall cracked and began to crumble, spewing impermanence everywhere as it dismantled itself boulder by fiery boulder until nothing remained but a sea of orange suede.

It was too much for me, all that cracking and dismantling. Nearby noises, Steve's banter with the Canadians, the guide's vamos! vamos!, it all retreated into the distance. And then, with no warning, it happened: My syntax simply departed, leaving my words to float in the atmosphere like dust. My rationality, drifting out there among the birds. Soon enough, the words themselves scattered and dissolved, leaving me to experience the world without categories, without reference. Ever tried to take a math test while falling into a lake while sleeping? Well, it was just like that.

If only I had met Yuri before climbing Pacaya. Yuri, the middle-aged Russian mystic I would meet in Nepal the following year. Yuri, who after 45 days of meditation would invite me over to his mountain shack for incense and a fire. (Mystics are like that.) "There is no I and you, there is only we," he said in all seriousness before turning a watery gaze to the Annapurna massif. "See that man plowing the mustard field? We are plowing the mustard field," he said. Yuri was a man of wide intelligence, a professional back in Moscow, but one of no particular standing since he was accustomed to saying, well, mystical things like "A man who wants is a man at war with himself" and "Are we not all One, the humans, the birds, the sky unending?" and "Words, Joe, they tether us to an impoverished existence." And of course there was the small impracticality of his silent sitting for months on end, his just being. This is not the kind of guy you put in charge of your new Pepsi campaign.

Even Party Al would have helped me understand Pacaya. Party Al, Steve's college roommate, who would sit in silence for hours during the blaze of day. Steve would come home between classes to find Al sitting in the living room, upright and motionless.

"What are you doing?" Steve would ask, to which Al would offer a slow "Sitting."

"Yeah, I can see that. But sitting and reading? Sitting and thinking? Sitting and what?"

"Just sitting," Al would reply.

As you might have guessed, Al was something of a partier, but what you wouldn't have known, what no one knew from the looks of him, was that he was also a renowned bagpipe player. Among the students, Al was well known, celebrated

> I want to use the word cosmic here because cosmic it was, an encounter with a God mysterious.

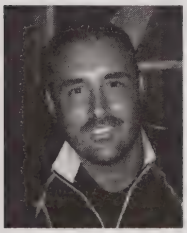
even, for his ability to muscle out a performance with terrific prowess before a crowd of thousands while throbbing in pain from the antics of the night before, and that libertine reputation led to less than charitable interpretations of what he was actually doing during all that living room sitting. But I can't help but think there was something going on behind that blank stare of his, that there was something more to Party Al, or less, a something less than nothing that moved him beyond language to the other side of silence, yes, that there was something less to Party Al than bagpipes and cottonmouth, to which Yuri would have offered a knowing nod. What I would give to see Party Al up on that mountain with Yuri. Yuri would surely be impressed by his bagpipes, but would their silences be two parts of a greater whole?

I know what you're thinking. No, I wasn't high up there on Pacaya. I wasn't low. I wasn't looking for an experience to trans-

form my life into something special. Stripped of language, I simply slipped beneath it all—and by it all, I suppose I mean my mind—to a place where even fundamental distinctions were no longer clear, like the difference between you and me, right from left, now and not-now. And though mighty and positive, it was also a place of purgation, an evisceration of the psyche, you might say. Truth be told, I want to use the word cosmic here because cosmic it was: an encounter with a God mysterious, though not the God of Michelangelo's making, not ol' Greybeard himself.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, we have reached the end of my writing ability, for I can slather on the similes all day—it's the dead of winter, and I have nothing better to do—but deep down I know they won't succeed. What I can do, however, is offer you this, a trail of facts, and ask that you kindly make of it what you will: I don't remember the hike down, or much of the flight home, but when I got there, I threw out 30 books I knew I'd never read. I've since thrown out 30 more. I took art off my walls. I cut my hair. I trimmed my fingernails. I cleaned my car. I am down to three pairs of pants. I cancelled Netflix. I no longer enjoy martinis. Let me say that again: I no longer enjoy martinis. I focus more on people and less on my perception of their perception of me. I used to think the circle was the perfect form. Now I only like circles when I imagine them collapsing on themselves, realizing their ultimate point form. If a circle's just going to hang around being a circle, it's wasting space I figure.

Where, I ask you, where will this profound sense of economy lead? Probably to my vanishing. That's what I'd say if I were a betting man. SJ



Joseph Little, PhD, is a professor of English at Niagara University, where he teaches courses in writing and directs the first-year writing program. His research focuses on the interplay of metaphor and science. A composite of two recent trips to Guatemala, "Mountain Mysticism" is his first attempt at creative nonfiction.

Forgive My Fear

RYAN CHOKUREVA

I walk on space,
On air so thin
I fear to fall.

Dear God forgive me
For my fear to love
For being so small
In a world so big
Forgive me for not wanting pain
For seeing it first before joy

I know I shouldn't look first,
At how easy I bruise
Or harden my shell to outside touch,
Or hide within my self,
Or stare with dead eyes

Forgive my fear
Of reaching out over empty spaces,
For taking all the love you give
And giving nothing in turn

When next I shy, nudge me to try
When next I sigh, nudge me to smile
When next love needs, steady my feet
That I may be here,
To brave my fear.

Ryan Chokureva lives and works as a graphic and web designer in Johannesburg. He writes for the love of words and joy of self-expression.

When There is Turmoil

JOAN SICHEL

For when there is turmoil, I go to you.
When I gaze upon your warm, gentle waters . . . I see peace.
When I hear your soft rustling breezes whispering through the trees . . .
I hear peace.
When I stand up on your resilient ground . . .
I feel the support of peace.

Your air
Yes, your air
She fills my lungs.

Your sunlight from above raises me out of my darkness and into your warm golden arms.

To you, I walk.
I step forward.
I am overjoyed.

Loved, comforted, cradled in your bosom.
Honoring, rocking, joyful.

My soul dances
Because she knows . . . she is home.

Joan Sichel is a meditation guide who teaches spiritual journaling and meditation in the Princeton, NJ area. She recently opened her personal journals on her new blog: www.joanseashell.blogspot.com. Her entries have found many homes from art exhibits to various places of worship.

Loaves and Fishes

CELIA ALLISON HAHN

Thank You for teaching me one more time
that nothing I can grasp,
nothing I can describe or articulate,
is the Holy, the Whole.
I can't see You face to face.
But You provide symbols
in lore and in life.
Off those sacred satellites
I catch sideways glimpses,
reflected flashes of Your grace:
laughter,
the offered joy of intimacy,
good enough work to do,
my grown children carving out their lives,
quiet morning moments
by dawn's apricot shimmer on the lake,
the Sunday morning miracle
where all the faces are transfigured,
Your body, the church
where each of us brings our small gifts--
like the boy's barley loaves and fishes—
none of them the Whole,
only fragments
like pieces of broken bread.

But it is enough,
and I can move on—
small, vulnerable,
not very sure
but sufficiently sturdy
to walk into every moment You provide.

Celia Hahn was the founding editor at The Alban Institute and is the author of two books; *Uncovering Your Church's Hidden Spirit* and *Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control* and many articles. She attended Union Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School, and served as Director of Christian Education at Grace Church, Silver Spring, Maryland.

The Cherokee Legend of the Sacred Pipe

STORY TOLD BY: DANCING HEART RISING

Many stories have been told about the 'Sacred Pipe'. The Whites refer to it as The Peace Pipe, but persons of Indian descent know it as a sacred item having a special place in Indian cultures. The pipe, in one form or another, has come to most cultures around the world. Every society has used the pipe in one way or another.

Our Lakota brothers tell the story of the White Buffalo woman and how she first brought the pipe to the Red man. What is important is not how the pipe first arrived or who it came to first. What is important is that the pipe is revered as a sacred item and also important is that it did come from The Creator. What is most important is that the pipe was brought to all men of this world, for we all must share this world.

This is the story of how the pipe first came to the Southern Cherokee. If you know any differences in this story that is because it was told to me this way:

Long ago, but not long after the world was new, a tribe of red-skinned people came to live on the lands which are around The Blue Smoke Mountains. At this time, the animals of the world still talked to men and taught them how to live on and care for the land. These people were called *Ani Yun Wiya* or the One True People. In this tribe lived a brave warrior woman. She was called 'Arrow Woman.' Arrow Woman was taught to use the bow, the spear and the knife. Even though it was a man's job to hunt and fight, Arrow Woman could shoot straighter with the bow than any man, she could throw the knife so as to split a branch no bigger than your

thumb and she could throw the spear into the eye of a hawk in flight. Because of all this, no man would tell her to be like a woman.

One day while on a hunt, Arrow Woman came upon the tracks of *Yona* the bear. She saw blood on the ground and knew him to be wounded so she followed his tracks. High into the mountains she followed. Soon she came to a place that she did not know. It was in this place, a place known only to the animals that she finally saw Yona the bear. He had a deep cut in his side and she saw him bowing down in prayer. She saw him bowing toward a large field of tall grass and speaking words that she had not heard before. Suddenly, the grass shimmered and became a lake. Arrow Woman saw Yona dive into the water. After a time he emerged from the water, his side was completely healed.

Yona then saw Arrow Woman and walked to her.

Yona told her, "this is the sacred lake of the animals. It is called, *Atagahi* and it's location is known only to the animals. It is where we come for healing and strength. You are the first man creature to see the sacred lake. You must never tell your kind of its location for it is the home of The Great *Uktena*." With these words Yona the Bear turned and walked into the woods and disappeared.

> The pipe is not a symbol of things that are sacred. The pipe itself is sacred.

Arrow Woman was tired after following Yona all day so she decided to rest a while by this lake. She built a small fire and sat down to eat a meal that she had brought with her. She took a drink of the water from the lake and felt instantly refreshed. She was amazed, she felt strong as *Yan'si* the Buffalo. She felt as if she run faster than *Coga* the Raven could fly.

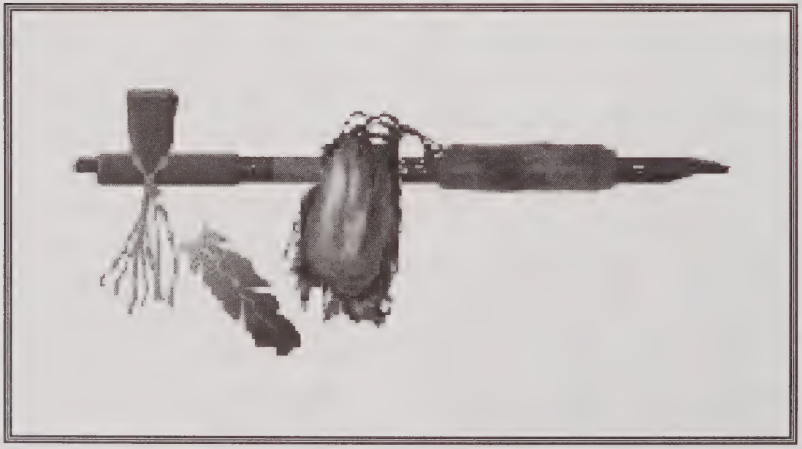
The woods were quiet, *Unole,* the wind, was sleeping, *Nvda,* the sun, was shinning bright but was not hot, the surface of the lake was completely calm. Arrow Woman began to get sleepy. It was at this time that she saw Uktena. She had been told of him when she was a child but no one in her tribe ever claimed to have seen him.

High above the water he raised his great serpent's head, the jewel in his forehead glistening. He began to move toward her. Arrow Woman grabbed up her spear and stood up to face the great creature coming to her, standing proud, showing no fear, the way any warrior should. She raised her spear and prepared to strike the huge beast.

Uktena stopped a short distance from her. He smiled, his mouth was larger than a man was tall and full of teeth longer than man's forearm. He spoke to the brave woman on the bank of his lake. To her he said, "Put down your weapons for I mean you no harm. I come only to teach."

Arrow Woman laid down her spear and began to relax, somehow knowing Uktena spoke truly.

Uktena told her to sit and to listen. Uktena dipped his head below the surface and came back up a moment later. In his mouth he had a strangely crooked stick and a



leather pouch. These things he laid on the ground in front of Arrow Woman.

Then the Great Uktena began to teach. He said, "This that I have laid before you is the Sacred Pipe of The Creator." He then told her to pick up the pipe. "The bowl is of the same red clay The Creator used to make your kind. The red clay is Woman kind and is from the Earth. Just as a woman bears the children and brings forth life, the bowl bears the sacred tobacco (*tsula*) and brings forth smoke. The stem is Man. Rigid and strong the stem is from the plant kingdom and like a man it supports the bowl just as man supports his family."

Uktena then showed Arrow Woman how to join the bowl to the stem saying, "Just as a man and a woman remain separate until joined in marriage so too are the bowl and stem separate. Never to be joined unless the pipe is used."

Uktena then showed her how to place the sacred tsula into the pipe and with an ember from the fire lit the tsula so it burned slightly. He told her this, "The smoke is the breath of The Creator, when you draw the smoke into your body, you will be cleansed and made whole. When the smoke leaves your mouth, it will rise to The Creator. Your prayers, your dreams, your hopes and desires will be taken to Him in the smoke. Also the truth in your soul will be shown to Him when you smoke the pipe. If you are not true, do not smoke the pipe. If your spirit is bad and you seek to deceive, do not smoke the pipe." Uktena continued his lesson well into the night teaching Arrow Woman all of the prayers used with the pipe and all of the reasons for using the pipe. He finished just as the moon was beginning her nightly journey across the sky in search of her true love. He told Arrow Woman to wrap the pipe in red cloth, keeping the parts separate.

With this done He told her that she would never again be able to find this place but to remember all that she had learned.

Uktena then returned to the depths of the lake.

Arrow Woman saw the water shimmer and become again the field of grass. She left, taking with her the pipe and her lessons and a wondrous tale.

Ever since that time, the Ani Yun Wiya have used the sacred pipe and never again has any man seen the sacred lake of Uktena.

The pipe is not a symbol of things that are sacred. The pipe itself is sacred. Not everyone is called upon to be a pipe bearer. The person who carries the pipe and practices the pipe ceremonies and traditions has a great responsibility to his brothers and sisters, his land and country and even to the Earth Mother.

The pipe bearer does not 'own' the pipe he carries. He simply carries the pipe until the time comes for him to pass it to the next bearer. The pipe bearer is given certain powers of sight from the pipe as well as an ability to heal and purify. Should the bearer fall from grace and become a liar or thief or become deceitful, the pipe would repossess these gifts and then the possibility of misfortune for the former bearer may exist.

One should be ready to accept the responsibility of the pipe for it may make demands upon you. It will become your teacher and guide. It can also be your worst enemy if used wrongly.

I leave it to you to decide if these words are truly said. This is the way that I have learned. See you on the medicine path.

Traditionally, Native American legends have been passed down by oral tradition from generation to generation. In the early twentieth century, Black Elk, of the Lakota Nation, began to put oral traditions in writing. The Lakotas have a similar legend. To learn more, please visit www.birdclan.org

Walking with Teresa of Avila

MEGAN DON

The road to Avila is one of ascent. Mountains and valleys pass by with unique walls of rock creating a solid foundation for your journey. Light beckons and then is gone, only to reappear through chasms unseen. Occasional glimpses of rivers and their beds fall away and become specks of blue and white. This is a land that is serious in its intent. It prepares you as you climb towards the home of Teresa, the great mystic of Avila.

There it is, the walled city. My breath draws back into itself with a strange gasp. Even though I have visited before, I am paused in sheer wonder. In that moment I understand why Teresa referred to God as Majesty, for that is what these walls are, majestic, in both sight and size. And there is the gateway, the entry. I approach with trepidation. I know you do not remain who you are once you enter. I close my eyes for a simple second. I pass through and something happens, though I am not sure what. Everything within me becomes alert.

I take myself, or so I think, through the streets, stepping on cobblestones and feeling stonewalls. I climb towers circling the city, and view mountains peaked with snow. There is strength and solidity. This is the castle that Teresa entered. This is her Interior Castle that was transformed from solid stone into luminous light and crystal. And what a journey that was for her. And still is for her. She remains here in all her fire and determination, her soul and energy radiating a presence through the city. She is alive and well and as fiery as ever, waiting to escort us into our own mansions.

I hear her habit rustling. I feel her deliberate nature next to me. It is not urgent, more like striding into life, focused, listening, thinking. Sometimes too much thinking, and then an exasperated release back into silence. I thought she was jour-

neying with me, but I realize that it is I who am journeying with her. She smiles and strides ahead. No wonder she caused much distress to her fellow nuns and priests—she moves quickly, very quickly. And once she captures God she does not let go.

This divine prison,
of love in which I'm living,
has made God my captive,
and my heart free;
causing in me such passion,
to see God, my prisoner,
That I die because I do not die.
~Teresa of Avila (translated by Megan Don)

We walk to the Encarnacion, the monastery where she spent almost thirty years of her life. The whole building is on fire with her love. I stop in the small garden opposite and breathe in her passion. Even from here it is strong. My eye moves slightly to the left. Someone knows her well. A statue, in proportion to her soul, reveals all. She is striding forward with a force that is deliberate, determined. It is a wonder the artist could contain her on the foundation stone. She is walking out as we are walking in.

God knew Teresa was too large to be contained by monastery walls and even the walls of Avila. Her intellect, charisma, mysticism, and continual lesson in surrender had to be spread beyond the normal feminine boundaries, and spread she did. Divinely plotting a new Carmelite Order, for both women and men within these Encarnacion walls, she secretly, yet boldly defected and went to another part of town. It was a political affair with those for and against. She herself straddled from side to side, but finally she leapt. This was a beginning for many more monasteries to come, and many more instances where her self-trust was placed before the large mirror of doubt.

There are many memories in these Encarnacion stones and none more divinely vital than her Chapel of the Transverber-

ation. At the gateway to the city my breath withdrew; at this chapel my breath stopped. It was as if my own heart had been pierced with the arrow of love and no longer needed air and blood and circulation – only love. My body did not move, my mind and heart on fire. There was nothing in this moment that made any sense of our worldly life. It seemed so far from truth, so distant from love. Teresa's ecstatic face was on the wall; again, the artist dipping deep inside and releasing her soul. I sat in silence, and gratitude, for a very long time.

When the gentle hunter shot me
and left me in all my weakness,
in the arms of love
my soul fell
and being charged with new life
I have changed in such a way
That My Beloved is for me
and I am for my Beloved.

He pierced me with an arrow
laced with the herbs of love
and my soul became one
with her Creator;
I no longer want another love,
since I have given myself to my God,
That My Beloved is for me
and I am for my Beloved
~ Teresa of Avila (translated by Megan Don)

The river called me. It was time to bathe in a different kind of love – soft, gentle, slow. I was breathing in the soon-to-arrive spring air; feeling the pregnant sun waiting to give birth to warmth; hearing the trees breathing out the last of their winter breath. And that is when I met him, San Juan de la Cruz, or to some, Saint John of the Cross. He joined me on my walk, or was I joining him? He showed me trees praising God, the river

© Megan Don

singing with the birds in joy, the grass growing for love, the stones solid in their commitment to be. There was great excitement as we approached. The stones began shouting over one another, all asking for him to come and sit on them. He chose the highest. And he showed me the secret of his joy. It was here, with all of nature celebrating and singing and growing that he understood the nature of our soul. We are born to be joyfully alive, no matter what is occurring in our inner or outer world. We are a joyful life, which cannot be destroyed, even in the darkest and smallest of prison cells. What a glorious afternoon.

Alba de Tormes, Teresa's place of death. It is here that her heart is exposed. Literally. It is a strange brown-gray color and somewhat misshapen, but after four hundred and twenty-six years of material manifestation, it is understandable. For one who is visually sensitive I am not easily attuned to body parts in various stages of decay, however, I found myself outside the glass cabinet that Teresa's heart is contained in. Standing there was a young woman - I could hear the richness of her prayer in my mind. I let myself sink into the silence, and I heard, "ask for the miracle of healing." I listened to Teresa's heart, I listened to mine, I joined with the heart of the young woman next to

me, and what leapt from my soul was a prayer asking for self-forgiveness. In that instant, I saw image after image tumbling before me, and felt the greatest release and relief in my soul. Not only was I forgiving myself but also all others I had not been able to forgive. The miracle of healing had occurred. There was freedom. I bowed in thanks, to God, to Teresa, to the woman next to me, and to my own soul. We were all needed in this little miracle of love.

That old brown-gray heart now has a very special place in my young pink one. I know now that the timelessness of love lives on in all our hearts, no matter where in the universe we are traveling. The young woman I was standing next to was called Teresa. She was from Prague. She had been re-baptized back into her Christian tradition just five years before. Her Buddhist training in meditation she still employs, and now accompanies it with a new-old message of love, forgiveness, and prayer. Our souls understood one another, so did our minds and hearts.

Avila. Teresa. The two cannot be separated, just as the rain from heaven cannot be separated from the river on earth. Teresa's love of love and love of truth is what incited her passionate soul. It made her lie awake at night in despair, it made her have many deep and intimate relationships with both men and women, and it finally made her turn within. The truths and love on the outside were too many and too varied. She needed to find her own. And that is her message to us. Find your own love and pathway to God, go within, deep within your Interior Castle and ask to be shown the way. Then listen and follow. Do not argue or doubt. She asks, "Do you want liberation?" And she replies, "If I can do it, so can you."

Megan Don is an award-winning author and a spiritual director. She leads pilgrimages to Europe and spiritual retreats based on the mystic feminine teachings. www.mysticpeace.com
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Tunnels in the Snow

KATY Z. ALLEN

Have you ever felt like you needed to save the world? Or at least a good portion of it? The urge to eliminate pain from the world comes from some deep place hidden within, and it drives me to try to be helpful. But it sometimes is a burden too great to bear.

After a series of heavy snowstorms, rain came. Yet more than a foot of snow still remained. I noticed remnants of pine cones under a tree, evidence of little animals. Then I spied a hole in the snow a couple of inches in diameter. I peeked in. Near the ground, the downward tunnel disappeared as it turned horizontal. What a wonderful window into another world! I remembered seeing remains of networks of such tunnels in springtime's past. This day I had stumbled upon a doorway to tunnels still in use.

I thought of a recent encounter of a different sort, during my weekday prayer:

"*Et tse-mach Da-vid av-d'cha m'hei-rah tats-mi-ach* . . . Cause the progeny of David, your servant, to blossom quickly. Let him shine in your deliverance, for we await your salvation every day. Blessed are You, *Adonai* (Lord), who causes the light of salvation to blossom."

That afternoon, I had a totally new and unexpected response to this blessing in the *Amidah*, the central prayer of every Jewish service: "I don't have to save the world!" I suddenly realized. "I can't!" I happen to be certain that I am not descended from David. Relief flooded me. I'm not the one whose job it is to save the world!

Time went by, and my relief became tempered by sadness. If I don't have to save the world, who will? What will happen? My mind

wandered back to the tunnels, to my hikes in the woods, to my need for connecting with the Earth. I know I'm not the only one who feels this way. Ann Zwinger writes in her book *Wind in the Rock*, "Many of us need this wilderness as a place to listen to the quiet, to feel at home with ancient rhythms . . . to know the pulse of a river, the riffle of the wind, the rataplan of rain on the slickrock . . ." That deep, deep need—it must be in our genes. When I enter the woods, a meadow or walk along the beach, I can literally feel my blood pressure drop. Magic happens there—the magic of calm and comfort and wonder and awe and connection.

The Earth provides more than an emotional haven. Zwinger continues "Here in the wilderness is a safety valve for our civilization, an environment which can absorb our pollution, and given time, cleanse itself . . ." The wilderness can heal so much . . . but it can heal just so much, and no more. The natural world is in danger. Our species has settled in every corner of the planet. We are spreading our pollution to the remotest spots. We are changing the land and the water and the air. We are changing the climate. Ann Zwinger questions, "And what of the designated wilderness land that we still have: how does it remain wilderness? . . . ."

How do we become in sync with the Earth, of which we are a part, that it and all those that call it home may continue on in some more primordial rhythm of life and death?

There are multiple answers. The "techno-fix" is one alternative as expressed by John Grim in his article "Transforming Religions" that appeared in *E: The Environmental Magazine*. The "techno-fix," involves finding technological stop-gaps, such as pesticides and biotechnology, to deal with the question, but the "techno-fix response shows no awareness of the need in the human for the deep inner beauty, awe, and even terror of natural

processes."

Terror of natural processes! We need it? A powerful thought it is to consider that we need earthquakes, tsunamis, storms, and wildfires—that life in a terrarium would not work for us. Terror—our visceral reminder of our smallness, of that which is beyond us, of the limits of our ability to control.

And yet, we are also not so small. We are gigantic, especially in our ability to engender change and to destroy. "Every trail that I maintain is showing more and more hiking pole damage each year," writes Stephen Crowe. Even as we engage in acts of communion with the Earth, we cause damage. Ann Zwinger maintains, "The greatest danger to the Earth may be in loving it to death."

Experiences of trying to help those closest to me come to mind. "Helping" can so

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easily be doing what we think someone else wants or needs rather than what they actually want or need, and may even be asking for, if only we would pay close enough attention. If I truly want to help someone I need to take the time to listen, and to understand what the person really needs.

The same issue comes into play when we go into other communities or countries to "help." One example remains with me of an NGO in Africa that helped establish a cooperative farm. The members of the community helped at first, to be kind to the "helpers," but then quickly dropped away. Cooperative farming could not motivate them to work hard. They needed and wanted their own plots of land, to work hard to feed their own families. But no one had asked them.

What about the Earth? What does the Earth need? It is speaking to us in so many ways. Are we listening? Are we emptying our hearts and our souls and our minds to make room to hear the answers? Do we truly understand?

A picture of a paradox of opposites is emerging. I remember a teaching by the Hasidic master Rabbi Bunim Peshiskha, that every person should have two pockets, with a note in each pocket. When one is feeling lowly, depressed, or disconsolate, one should reach into the right pocket and take out the note with the words, "The world was created just for me." When one is feeling proud and high and mighty, one should reach into the other pocket and take out the note with the words, "I am but dust and ashes." We are each the joining of two worlds. We are fashioned out of clay, but our spirit is the breath of Adonai.

We are nothing and we are everything. On the one hand, we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. God causes the light of salvation to blossom, so I, too, must cause the light of salva-

tion to blossom. I must do something. I must not stand idly by.

On the other hand, we must do nothing except let go. A patient once described to me the need to trust God in the face of life-threatening illness as being like falling backward into the arms of a group of people in a trust-building exercise. We must "fall into" the terror, into the damage done by poles, into the tunnels in the snow we cannot see.

I am not of the house of David; I am therefore not responsible for the entire world. However, I remain responsible for my little piece of the world. I must do something.

What do my family and friends need? What do the people of the world need? What does the Earth need? It may be difficult to hear the Earth's true voice, but on some level we can't have it both ways. At some point what the Earth needs and what we think we need are in total opposition, even with something as small and as simple as using poles to keep us safer when we hike. We are deeply attached to the Earth. We are part of it. But are we committed to it? Our attachment shows in the ways we exhibit our love – our hiking, our crossing the world to see its many wonders – and in the ways we try to help – our recycling and our purchases of hybrid vehicles. True commitment is much more difficult. True commitment requires a deep gut-level response and a corresponding and ensuing change. What would it take for us to slash our consumption, to forgo our desire to go on living and living and living, and to slacken our need to reproduce, all to

> To truly engender sacred change, to know what I must and can save, I must first see and know my world.

the point that our actions would save the planet? What would it take for me? What would it take for you? As we ponder our answer, we can consider the consequences of continuing to follow the direction in which we are currently headed.

We need to remember the tunnels and to see them. They are present beneath the crisp snow, but only when the snow melts can I see them. Their makers are inside them and know just where they are. The hidden runways keep them safe from hawks and close to the ground where they can remain warm and find seeds to carry them through the winter.

To truly engender sacred change, to know what I must and can save, I must first see and know my world.

I must hold onto my humility and to my power. I must let go and fall back. I must remain in control. All at the same time. SJ

Rabbi Katy Z. Allen lives in Wayland, MA, and is a chaplain at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA, and the founder and leader of *Ma'yan Tikvah*—A Wellspring of Hope, a congregation without walls based in Wayland that has services outdoors all year round. She leads interfaith programs connecting Earth and religion through the Ruah Spirituality Institute, a program of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries of Newton, MA.

Taos Corn Dance

POLLYANNA SEDZIOL

We, the ritualess, are gathered here
waiting…they, possessors of ritual,
possessors of the mystery of history,
will, when they are ready, come forth.

They come, clothed in beauty,
to create a beauty of movement,
a beauty of tribal reverence,
memory not remembered, yet alive.

White deerskin moccasined feet
rock-step, rock-step, rock-step
obeying the drum's rhythm
weaving their row on the ancient loom.

First ceremony – before, not in – the Church.
Second ceremony – the great grandfather,
then another, and another and another,
around the Pueblo, ignoring the wistful watchers.

Perhaps this is our ritual –
pilgrimage from ancient to ancient
willing to grow, to become
more than we are.

Pollyanna Sedziol is seventy-five years old and has been writing poetry for more than fifty-five years! She devotes time to her loving family and the Used Book Depository, a ministry that sends books and Bibles to the underserved.

Norman S. Chamberlain, *Corn Dance, Taos Pueblo.*
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the U.S. Dept. of Labor

Dawn

SUE ANN YARBROUGH

By what name do I call God? Neither this question nor this poem may be completed in my lifetime. This morning I think that is okay. This morning it is enough just to love the beautiful light.

This morning I call God Essence
and I call God Rain
and I call God Coffee,
strong, dark, and fortifying
and Apple,
the sweet harvest.

I call God Candle,
that lights my way
from slumber.

I call God the Book of Meditations
that calls my heart to the
Heart that yearns to call us Home.

As I wonder what to call God this morning,
I hear the answer,

Everywhere.

Rev. Sue Ann Yarbrough, an ordained United Church of Christ minister, serves SpiritCare Ministry to Seniors, a ministry that takes worship and pastoral care to elders living in retirement homes, skilled nursing communities, and convalescent hospitals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

None of it is Ours

MARC HARSHMAN

None of it is ours,
none of it, really,
and for how long pretend
otherwise – as if you could hold tight
what is both gone and just now arriving –
this moment
you are reading here
is more
than the whole of your life
poured into the great vat
of time before and time after.
It is gift: this warm day in early spring,
your daughter's smile,
the remembered smell of grandma's baking on threshing day—
a million thousand other moments
could be named
and all are gift and all are now.
And what can you say?
You can't begin to say
it all—so you tell it
to your heart
and your heart then tells it
in the way you are
to me, to them, to yourself,
to the One who gave you
what is yet to be
given ever after.

Marc Harshman is the author of several periodical poetry publications and chap books as well as the author of eleven children's picture books including *The Storm*, a Smithsonian Notable Book.

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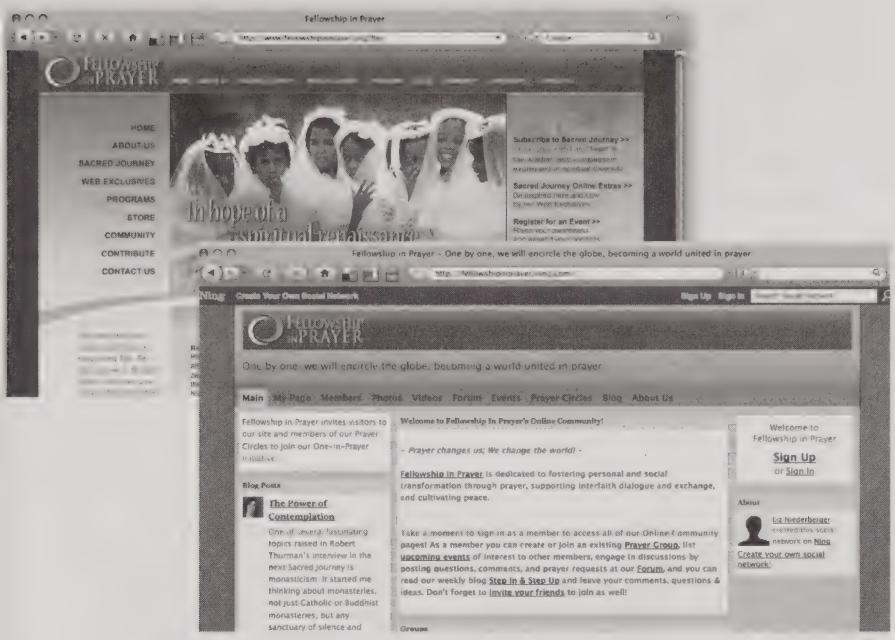
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The Power of Contemplation

Step In & Step Up

Be sure to read our blog! Join us in reflecting on the interface between spiritual practice and today's social issues. Consider the wisdom found in our religious diversity.

Join the conversation. Share your story; offer your perspective; comment on *Sacred Journey*.

Let's all **Step In** to spiritual awareness and **Step Up** to meet today's challenges!

The Healing Wall

BARBARA CONDRON

The Stone People (Rocks) are the Eldest living beings
on Mother Earth, therefore are deserving of the utmost respect.
I have been taught that they serve the role of record-keepers.
It was also explained to me that Great Mystery breathed
its breath into each and every stone thus granting them all unique
and valuable gifts and lessons to bestow upon earth's other creatures.
~ KENNETH MEADOWS

Indigenous people around the world honor the Earth and the Sky, for their lives depend upon them. Today's modern societies are learning that same lesson as the Earth moves through her evolutionary growth. Many cultures have recognized humans as the connectors between Heaven and Earth. Shamans, medicine men/women, and priests are the interpreters of energies. Now, with the advancement of consciousness moving through our species, the opportunity exists for increasing numbers of people to awaken to the "sacred journey" we share with each other, with Heaven and with the Earth. The Healing Wall is one such opportunity.

In January 2003, the leaders of the School of Metaphysics met in annual general assembly in the upper chamber of the Peace Dome to discuss its future. During that meeting, the idea of the Healing Wall was conceived. Later that summer, the 18 foot by 9 foot relief map of the world was fashioned by youthful campers and their mentors.

Since then, the Healing Wall has demonstrated its intended purpose. Individuals have sent healing to the world and received healing in return. Families have been united. Hearts have mended and heads have cooled. It is a place for transformative change in ourselves and our planet.

Consciousness and mindfulness has always been the focal point and has grown and matured, revealing itself in stages—the creation of the wall by young and old working together, the blessing of the wall, the painting of the wall and the many ceremonies and services held here to consecrate this site. Then midst the sequence of earthquakes in early 2010, the entire continent of Asia separated from the wall. It was as if the Healing Wall was responding to the changes in Mother Earth. We are respecting this shift in the wall's appearance as we continue to move toward 2020 when the stones will be inlaid. We invite you to participate in this spiritual practice.

HOW TO SELECT A STONE FOR THE HEALING WALL

Before you commit the native stone you've chosen for the Healing Wall, invite the Spirit of that stone to participate in the creation of the Healing Wall by asking its permission. Here are some simple steps to follow:

1. Go to a quiet place, stone in hand. (That stone is also referred to as metal, which is the physical manifestation of the planet that you are inviting to become a part of the Healing Wall. In the Native American tradition, the Great Hoop of Life consists of six points: the four elements plus the earth below and the heaven above.)

The ideal quiet place is the natural setting where the stone would normally reside. We suggest a place which include any of the elements (air, fire, water, wood).

2. Choose a place to sit and set the rock on the ground in front of you.

3. Focus your mind through gentle breathing, until you're aware of the inhalation and exhalation of your breath. This creates a sixth element, ether. This element is the nonphysical reality of the Mind's attention. When the Mind's attention is directed inward, by will—in this case receiving the mineral or metal form—inner level communication can be received because the consciousness (the seventh element) of the individual opens. Native Americans experience this as the Stone People speaking.

4. Pick up the stone with your right hand and place it in your left, moving your attention from your breath to the stone as you do so. Rest your attention on the stone. Be with it, harmonizing through receiving its character and beauty.

5. Quietly ask the stone, "May I give you to the Healing Wall at the Peace Dome?" You are asking permission to be the means of conveyance for this to manifest.

6. Hold your mind still so you might receive the stone Spirit's answer. The spirits speak in many ways so keep your mind focused, clear and free so you will recognize the answer when you receive it. When the answer is given, you will know what action to perform and the wisdom of the elders will be yours.

The School of Metaphysics was founded in 1973 as a place where all people, of all backgrounds, can come to study, learn, teach and research ways to live in harmony with the Universal Laws that govern creation. Send your stone and stories to: The Healing Wall at the Peace Dome; School of Metaphysics; 163 Moon Valley Road; Windyville, MO 65783. For more information visit their web site www.som.org or www.peacedome.org

Aren't They All Our Children?

STEVE GOODIER

There are few things in this life more difficult to experience than the loss of one's child. Jim Wallis, in *Who Speaks for God* tells about a sad and terrifying incident that occurred during the tragic war in Sarajevo not too many years back. A reporter who was covering the violence in the middle of the city saw a little girl fatally shot by a sniper.

The reporter threw down his pad and pencil and rushed to the aid of a man who was now holding the child. He helped them both into his car and sped off to a hospital.

"Hurry, my friend," the man urged, "my child is still alive." A moment or two later he pleaded, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still breathing." A little later he said, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still warm."

When they got to the hospital, the young girl was gone. "This is a terrible task for me," the distraught man said to the reporter. "I must go tell her father that his child is dead. He will be heartbroken."

The reporter was amazed. He looked at the grieving man and said, "I thought she was YOUR child."

The man replied, "No, but aren't they all our children?"

I think that is one of the great questions of our age. Aren't they all our children? It is a question that deserves an answer.

Aren't they all our children? Those who live under our roof and those who reside with another family? Those to whom we are related as well as those whom we have never known?

Aren't they all our children? Those on our side of the border as well as those on the other side? Those of our nation no more or less than those of another?

Aren't they all our children? Those who worship like us and those who worship differently? Those who look like us and those who do not?

Aren't they all our children? The well-educated and the under-educated? The well-fed and the under-fed? Those who are secure and those who are at risk?

Aren't they all our children? The highly valued and highly esteemed as well as the castaways and the lost?

Aren't they all our children? Aren't they all our responsibility? ALL of them? Ours to nurture? Ours to protect? Ours to love?

I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the survival of our world hinges on the answer to that question.

To say they are NOT all our children is to condemn the world to more struggle—family against family, group against group, nation against nation.

Aren't they all our children? If we say yes, can we ever again pit them against each other? "If we have no peace," said Mother Teresa, "it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

Aren't they all our children?

There may be no greater question for our generation. And how we answer that question will determine the shape of our world for years to come. SJ

Steve Goodier holds a B.A. in anthropology and sociology from New Mexico State University and an M.Div. from Emory University. He is an ordained United Methodist minister and an author of numerous books and the widely read e-zine, *Your Life Support System,* promoting personal development, motivation and inspiration. Together with his wife, they have led numerous workshops on relational, spiritual and inter-personal growth topics. They currently make their home in Salt Lake City.

One Man's Perspective

KENT NERBURN

It is my personal conviction that we human beings are "believing" creatures. Until we take something into our hearts and embrace it with conviction, we are seeing through a gossamer (and distancing) veil of analysis. It's true that the information we gather during analysis guides us toward belief—and one would hope that our information gathering is informed and educated—but it is not belief. Belief is saying, "Yes, this is the way it is, and I will stand by it and defend it." It is a commitment of the heart.

I come from a long background in the study of religion. One of the ongoing arguments in the intellectual field of religious studies was whether or not one must be a believer to understand a faith or a belief system. After participating in this discussion for years, I came to the conclusion that the knowledge you gain is different based on whether you are a believer or an observer. Each has its role: sometimes it is better to stand on the outside for perspective; but to the extent that you can enter into a belief system and inhabit it, you come closer to the heartbeat of the spiritual experience that it expresses.

I came to believe—and I believe to this day—that the goal of any work of art that addresses spiritual issues should be to bring those who see or hear or read it as close to the experience of real belief as possible. When I worked as a sculptor I sought to embody spiritual states rather than describe them. When I turned to writing I sought to recreate moments of spiritual encounter rather than discuss them from the outside, and to walk my readers into them so they could participate in those encounters.

When I came to the unlikely calling of giving voice to the deep and complex spirituality of Native American people – a spirituality that has, I believe, much to teach us all—the chal-

lenge became more complex: how could I help you, the reader, enter into a complex spiritual experience not my own in a way that your hearts could be touched and your spirits informed by the richness of their belief?

I did not want you to be able to move to the distance of analysis. I did not want anyone to leave my writing saying, "That's interesting. I'll have to give it some serious thought." Yet I did not want you to think you (or I) could appropriate Native belief—a complex language—and culture based-spirituality—for ourselves. To encourage that would be to continue the long tradition of cultural appropriation that has been our way of dealing with the Native peoples since our arrival on this land, and I wanted no part of it.

What I needed was a way to bring you, the reader, into the presence of Native belief, just as I had been brought into its presence, without allowing you the distance of the observer or the false identification with it as if you were donning its mantle as your own.

This was no easy task. But I believed that Native experience contained truths we needed to know, and I knew that I had to make readers believe what I told them in order for them to take it into their hearts. I had to write in a way that would grab you at the level of belief; I had to bring you into the presence of Native experience so that you would participate in it, be inhabited by it, and leave a changed person.

A tall order, yes? But that's how important I thought the truths of Native American experience were to the shaping of an authentic American spirituality. We as a people have gotten lost somewhere between dogma and agnosticism, yet we are a spiritual people who hunger for belief. The Native way, with its tradition of granting each person the right to his or her own spiritual journey, while finding truth and meaning in the land, seemed to me to feed that hunger with an authority and authenticity that nothing else possessed. I needed to find a way to lead you into its presence in a way that would invest your experience with the authority of belief.

And so I set upon the task of searching for a literary vehicle that would serve that end. *Neither Wolf nor Dog*, and, now, *The Wolf at Twilight*, are the results of that search. Though done as traditional narratives, they use aspects of the novel, oral history, mythology, parable, and spiritual homily, to bring readers into the presence of Native experience as participants and not as observers.

The following is an excerpt from *The Wolf at Twilight*, we come into a conversation between the author and his friend Dan, an Indian Elder:

"Now I'm going to tell you something." he said. "Something Indian people know and your people never seem to figure out. What do you call the Creator?"

It seemed like an impossible logical leap.

"God, I guess."

"What does God mean?"

"I don't know. Just God. The one who's above everything. 'I Am Who I Am,' I guess. At least in Hebrew."

"Now, what do we call the Creator?"

"*Wakan Tanka*, I think."

"Right. Now what does Wakan Tanka mean?"

"The Great Mystery."

"Right," he said, "So, there you are."

This seemed to constitute some kind of finality for Dan, but it brought me no closer to any kind of understanding.

"Okay," I said. "So?"

"Just let that thought take a little rest so you can take a look at it."

He sat back and folded his arms. I remained quiet and acted like I was thinking.

"Did you figure it out?" he said.

I shrugged my shoulders noncommittally.

"I thought so," he said, as if talking to the class dunce. "If the Creator is the Great Mystery, that means you can't understand him, right?"

"If it's a him," I said.

He slapped at the air as if shooing away a fly. "That's a white-people problem. Stop trying to put logs in my path."

"Okay."

"So, saying that the Creator gave you a Black Book doesn't mean that you understand everything, does it?"

He answered his question before I could respond.

"No. Because if you understood everything, the Creator wouldn't be a mystery. We're not talking about a little mystery, here. We're talking about the Great Mystery—Wakan Tanka—the mystery that's behind everything, before the beginning of life and after the end of death. The mystery that's behind the

> What if your Black Book had a part of the truth and our *Inipi* had a part of the truth and other people had a different part of the truth?

sky, the birds, the stars, everything. *The Great Mystery. The Great Mystery.*" He said it twice as if by repeating it he was going to drill it into my thick skull.

"I understand," I said.

"Good. I figured you would. Now, remember when I said that it wasn't fair for the Creator to put all his teachings in a book, because then no one could have those teachings until they got that book? It's the same for the Buffalo Calf Woman or Jesus or anything else. That would mean that the people who don't have that teaching wouldn't have connection with the Creator. But everyone has connection with the Creator because everyone is part of creation, see?"

"I do." I had no idea what this had to do with learning literature or world history, but Dan was in good spirits, and it seemed best just to let him talk.

"Now, sometimes the Creator might send something special to help a people learn or to give them some special knowledge. He might give one people the skill to keep track of things in books. He might give another the skill to listen to nature. Our people's history is in our stories. Your people collect history from everywhere and put it in books. Those are different skills, just like there are different ways of understanding the Creator.

"You need to think about this. What if the Creator gave every people something special, something that other people don't have? What if he put his teachings in different hearts in different ways, like he put different teachings in the rocks than in the animals?

"What if your Black Book way had one part of the truth and our *Inipi* way had a part of the truth and other people had a different part of the truth? How would you look at the world, then? Would you try to kill the ways of other people? I don't think so, because you'd be killing a part of the Creator's truth.

"It's the same with learning. Maybe we aren't the collecting people; maybe we are the listening people. Maybe we can't take everything apart as well as you can, but maybe we can help you remember how it went together. We are all fingers on the hands of the Creator. We must learn to work together to make this a better world. We must learn to work together to be the Creator's hands here on earth."

"That's beautiful, Dan," I said.

"Everything that's true is beautiful," he said, "because everything that's true is from the Creator."

Kent Nerburn is an author, sculptor and educator who has been deeply involved in Native American issues, religion and education. He has edited several highly acclaimed books on Native American subjects including *The Wisdom of the Native Americans* and *The Soul of an Indian.* Nerburn's other books include *Letters to My Son*, and *Simple Truths.* This excerpt is from his latest book *The Wolf at Twilight* © 2010 New World Library and is used with permission. www.newworldlibrary.com

The Wolf at Twilight
An Indian Elder's Journey through a Land of Ghosts and Shadows

BY KENT NERBURN
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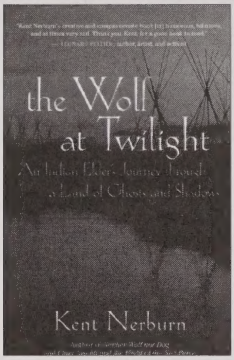

The Wolf at Twilight is a combination of memoir, historical narrative and spiritual reflection.

A casual note left on the windshield of a car, the death of an old dog and author Kent Nerburn unexpectedly finds himself back on the Lakota reservation where more than a decade before he traveled along with the tribal elder, Dan.

Now almost ninety, Dan wants Nerburn to assist in the unlikely task of burying Fatback, the old Labrador who had been Dan's closest companion during his twilight years. Though the request makes little sense, Nerburn agrees out of respect for the tribal elder. Once on the reservation, however, he finds that Dan's purpose runs far deeper. Dan wants Nerburn's assistance in finding out what happened to his little sister, Yellow Bird, who disappeared from a reservation boarding school almost eighty years before.

Nerburn's stunning prose evokes the Native American way of teaching and learning with a depth that few outsiders ever experience. The author has convinced the reader to follow him, participate with him and take his experiences into your heart as your own.

Blessing Song

CHRISTINE HODIL

We come from the Earth to give our blessings upon the Earth,
To bring our joy across the waters of the world, of the world.
We come to bless the children. We come to bless the elders of the world.
Heart is our home. Mind is our home.
We come to bring the blessings of the Earth.
Salvation starts and ends with the heart.
Salvation comes with each bless-ed person's mind and heart together.
We come to bring our freedom to this blue and green planet,
To bring the salvation of love, of love of many colors in this world.
The blessings pour from the great freedom of the sky
Of the earth, the fire, the water, the air, and all relations here.
The heart unifies the spirit of the Earth
Of the precious life abounding here with all of us.
We come to bring the blessings all through all the dimensions,
All the dimensions of life.
The subtlety is sound,
The preciousness gives light,
The harmony of all the spheres comes before us now.
We come, we come, we come, we come, we come together now.
We come to bring the peace of our minds.
We come to bring the peace of our hearts.
We come to bring the blessings of the Earth.

Blessing Song was spontaneously written through Christine's voice as she attuned to the visionary painting by Minoche Graglias, "Peacemakers: The 13 Grandmothers Council" (featured on our cover). www.sourcehealing.org To listen to Christine perform her beautiful song see www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Yf1QlQbpTc

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